Democratic Kampuchea and Human Rights: Correcting the Record

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The paucity of information in the mainstream press about the government's policies for the social and economic reconstruction of Democratic Kampuchea was matched only by the barrage of almost daily allegations that the government and Communist Party of Kampuchea were the worst violators of human rights in history, that they were restructuring Cambodian society at the barrel of a gun and practicing calculated and cold-blooded genocide against those allegedly significant elements of the population who opposed them. Few people outside Kampuchea knew that the country was exporting a substantial surplus of rice in 1977, but almost everyone had heard that huge numbers of Cambodians had been liquidated, with the exact number of victims ranging from 500,000 to as many as 3 million according to the most extreme estimates. In the face of such a negative propaganda attack, no account of Kampuchea under Pol Pot can avoid addressing the problem of alleged mass human rights violations. The very nature of the allegations makes them extremely difficult to substantiate; sources are usually not cited, and when they are, it is usually in such vague terms as "according to refugees" and, more often than not, on the basis of third-, fourth-, and even fifth-hand information. For example, a virulently anti-Kampuchean editorial appeared in the "Christian Science Monitor" (normally a liberal paper) on April 26, 1977, which turned out to be a fifth-hand account of events in Kampuchea; the only document the editor had read was a review by Lacouture that had appeared in the "New York Review of Books; the latter, in turn, was based on excerpts from material published in the book "Cambodia

in the Year Zero" by the French Father Ponchaud, and Ponchaud's material, in turn, was based on the accounts of refugees who had fled Kampuchea! The further the information went, the less balanced it became, ending up in the Christian Science Monitor as an extremely virulent anti-Communist propaganda barrage aimed at the government of Democratic Kampuchea. The distortions that accompanied the information at each stage of transmission must have made it almost impossible for the Pol Pot government to respond meaningfully or seriously, even if it were the official government in Phnom Penh, let alone for concerned researchers or scholars outside Kampuchea.

The purpose of this short article must necessarily be strictly limited; it is not intended to claim that no one has been killed in Kampuchea since the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975. (Such a claim would be meaningless, and Ieng Sary himself has said that "some killings could not be avoided." The author has never heard of a mass restructuring of a society along revolutionary lines that was not accompanied by bloodshed, be it the French or Russian revolutions or more recent attempts such as that of Ayotallah Khomeini in contemporary Iran). But there are enough details to cause thoughtful people to at least question the human rights claims. This article attempts to show that (1) the allegations have been grossly distorted; (2) the sources of the allegations are, in almost all cases, highly suspect and have a vested interest in discrediting the Pol Pot government; (3) the almost daily appearance of such reports in the general Western press is no mere coincidence, but rather a concerted effort to conceal the true causes of the Khmer people's misery by falsely blaming the Democratic Kampuchea government for the terrible conditions in Phnom Penh caused by U.S. policy toward the previous Lon Nol government and the Cambodian war; and (4) the restructuring of Khmer society was not a fanatical attempt to turn back the clock, but the only possible way for a responsible administration to alleviate the extreme misery

facing the Khmer nation in 1975. In September 1978, the British Foreign Office submitted a report to the United Nations in which it claimed (according to Reuters' summary) that "Father Ponchaud's opinion in February 1978 that more than 100,000 Cambodians had been executed must be taken as an absolute minimum. It was possible that two or three times that number had been executed. The number who died from lack of food, medical and sanitation facilities, and from the frantic pace of work may well have been more than two million". The British government report can be taken as fairly typical, arguing that between 100,000 and 300,000 were killed and that about 2 million may have died from other (remediable) causes such as malnutrition and lack of medical care. The figure of 2 million deaths (and note that "deaths" does not mean "executions") is quite common. It apparently comes from a claim made in Paris and first widely reported by Reuters in December 1977. The report reads, "An exiled Cambodian student group said on Wednesday that more than two million people, a third of Cambodia's population, have died since the Khmer Rouge took power in April.

Citing refugee reports, the Union of Young Khmer Students (UNIJEK) said "there are now virtually no births in Cambodia because of famine, epidemics and Khmer Rouge massacres." More extreme reports from refugees in Paris even tried to suggest that all 2 million deaths were the result of direct massacres; an alleged former Khmer Rouge political commissar, Ear Soth, quoted in Paris "an official statement made at an assembly of the victorious armies (held in Battambang in February 1977). According to this declaration, 2,500,000 class enemies had already been killed since the seizure of power in April 1975. The statement added that the Communist Party Organization (Angka) needed "two million survivors to rebuild democratic Kampuchea. Ear Soth was one of four recent refugees presented to the press by the indefatigable Father Ponchaud, all of whom were said to have held high

positions in the Kampuchean government and party organizations. Reporting on the conference, Agence France Presse expressed some surprise that "the refugees were unable to give details of resistance to the ruling regime. They repeated rumors that guerrillas were operating in Kompong Thom and Kompong Cham provinces. The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok had also reported that it believed that 1.2 million Cambodians had died (note again, not "executed") since the end of the war. The more extreme claim of up to two million dead or executed thus appears to have originated among Cambodian exiles in Paris and the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. Moreover, these same exiles were an important source of information on which Father Ponchaud relied to cite evidence for his book "Cambodia in the Year Zero".

However, a simple look at Khmer population statistics shows that the 2 million death figure is impossible. In 1967, the population of Sihanouk's Cambodia was verified to be 6,400,000.

At the end of the war, according to AFP, the Khmer population was "estimated at seven million". Ieng Sary stated in an interview with Der Spiegel in May 1977 that the population of Kampuchea was 7,760,000. There is little reason to disbelieve this claim, for the "not particularly progressive" Far East Economic Review of Hong Kong authoritatively states in its "1978 Yearbook" that the population of Kampuchea is 7,887,000. (The "1979 Yearbook" puts it at 8.2 million.)

It may be pertinent to ask why the death of 2 million people (more than a quarter of the country's population) is not reflected in the population figures, especially when the same dubious sources already cited state that "there have been virtually no births in Cambodia"! It should also be noted that the ever-increasing population figures cited above continued throughout the period of the Cambodian War. The Pol Pot government claimed that some 800,000 Khmers died during the war (this figure has never been disputed by any US authorities and can probably be considered a relatively accurate

estimate). In addition, Ieng Sary stated in the same Der Spiegel interview that "about 2,000 or 3,000 people died during the evacuation of the city (Phnom Penh) and another few thousand died in the rice fields. Other statements made in the Ieng Sary interview were later found to be true. (In response to the then-current allegation that Sihanouk had been executed, Ieng Sary stated, "He is alive and living with his wife in the former Royal Palace. Interestingly, this remark was not believed at the time either, until Sihanouk - embarrassingly for the rumor-mongers - actually emerged publicly from the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh!) Whichever way one looks at the population statistics, Ieng Sary's remarks seem likely; two million deaths are downright impossible.

The population statistics also reveal some interesting changes in racial composition. The 1967 census shows that out of a total population of 6,400,000, there were 330,000 Chinese (or 5.1 percent); 300,000 Vietnamese (4.6 percent); and 10,000 Indians. In other words, about 10 percent of the total population was not Khmer. The 1978 statistics show that 99 percent of the population is Khmer and "significant ethnic minorities: none. This apparent change has led some observers to suggest that the missing 9 percent of non-Khmer peoples may have been the subject of liquidation campaigns. It is certainly true that the Pol Pot government had little reason to be sympathetic to the Vietnamese minority, most of whose roots in Cambodia go back to the time when they (rather than the Khmers) were imported under the aegis of the French colonial government to staff the nascent colonial bureaucracy. (Khmer-Vietnamese mistrust goes back even further, of course.) But the disappearance of the Vietnamese minority is by no means the responsibility of the Khmer Rouge. Many of the 150,000 Vietnamese living in Phnom Penh in 1969 fled or were deported after the Lon Nol government staged a series of massacres of the Vietnamese minority in April 1970. In 1971, William Sullivan testified before the U.S. Senate that

only 3,000 to 10,000 Vietnamese remained in Phnom Penh. It is possible that the remaining Vietnamese minority was deported to Vietnam under the new Kampuchean administration, as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported on November 3, 1978: "The country with the largest number [of refugees] is Vietnam, where 350,000 people have fled from Cambodia. A later report on December 10, 1978, stated, "More than 300,000 Cambodians have sought refuge in Vietnam. It is more reasonable to assume that after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, some of these refugees were former Khmers of Vietnamese origin, and one can only assume that they are now back in Cambodia. (This assumption seems plausible following the release on January 13 this year of "a manifesto issued in Phnom Penh by the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council headed by Heng Samrin to mark the establishment of the new 'People's Republic of Kampuchea,' which, according to a Bangkok Kyodo News Service report, promised 'freedom and equality between the sexes and among different ethnic groups. Since 99 percent of Cambodia under Pol Pot was racially pure Khmer, one can only assume that the "different ethnic groups" referred to in the Vietnamese-backed government's manifesto were brought back to Cambodia from Viet Nana by Heng Samrin and his cronies). As for the other large minority counted in the 1967 census, there is little evidence of particular hardship. Ito Tadashi of the Kyodo News Service, who visited Democratic Kampuchea in September/October 1978, reported: "Ny Kan (the Foreign Ministry official who accompanied us on our tour) said that the problems Vietnam had with its Chinese population did not affect Cambodia because all people in Cambodia, including the Chinese, were treated equally. He admitted that "the few who had special privileges in the days before liberation have had some problems adjusting". The Pol Pot government thus clearly claimed that there were still overseas Chinese living in Democratic Kampuchea.

In short, the exaggerated claims that as many as 2 million Cambodians had been killed or had died since the liberation of Phnom Penh in 1975 are absurd, and when compared with population statistics and the then-known numbers of Cambodian refugees (about 350,000 in Vietnam and more than 100,000 in France, Thailand, and the U.S.), the lesser claims of 100,000 to 300,000 massacred seem to stretch the population data. These figures appear to be based on the 12,000 or so Khmers living in exile in Paris. Of all the Cambodians abroad, those in Paris tend to come from the higher strata of Cambodian society, as the French government gives priority to refugees who already speak French or have family members already living in France. Most, therefore, come from the French-educated Cambodian elite of the pre-liberation era and, of course, have everything to gain from blackening the reputation of the Pol Pot government as much as possible.

But the Cambodian exiles in Paris are by no means the only source of human rights allegations against the Pol Pot government. Another source is the Cambodian refugees in Thailand, living in special refugee camps near the Thai-Cambodian border? The most famous revelation of these refugees' stories was in Time magazine on April 26, 1976, which stated, "Since the Communist victory, 500,000 to 600,000 people-about one-twelfth of Cambodia's population-have died of political reprisals, disease or starvation, and there is little sign that the wave of death has subsided. The country has become a kind of Indochinese Gulag archipelago, except that the whole country is an island of repression." Its sources were "news leaks from refugees who have managed to flee to Thailand. The article was accompanied by lurid line drawings (prepared by Time's artist) with titles such as "Artist's Rendering of Khmer Club Executions," "Plastic Bag Method for Slow Asphyxiation," and "Khmer Rouge Soldiers Bayoneting Official." There was, of course, no photographic evidence of the alleged executions. Perhaps the most curious feature of this source of information on Democratic

Kampuchea is the astonishing fact that there were no reports of atrocities from the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand until almost a year after the liberation of Phnom Penh. Moreover, the timing of this flow of information suggests that it may have had more to do with internal Thai politics than with Kampuchea. News of the existence of refugee camps for Cambodians in Thailand first appeared under the liberated government of Prime Minister In Tam; "M.R. Kuk-rit Pramoj. During this Thai administration, Ieng Sary visited Bangkok on several occasions, resulting in the establishment of a Thai-Khmer liaison office at the border town of Aranyaprathet, the start of trade between the two countries, and a joint communique on the future establishment of diplomatic relations signed by Ieng Sary and Thai Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan in November 1975. But relations between the two countries were still far from smooth, as evidenced by the series of border clashes that broke out in late 1975. In this context, the Kukrit government began to release information about the Cambodian refugee camps. On November 27, 1975, Premier Kukrit ordered the expulsion from Thailand of former Phnom Penh (pre-liberation) Premier In Tam; "M.R. Kukrit refused to discuss the reason for the expulsion of Mr. In Tam, who now lives near the Thai-Cambodian border, but said, 'He can't live here'" (Nation newspaper). On December 15, 1975 (more than two weeks later), the Nation reported under the headline "In Tam Still Here:

"Former Cambodian Prime Minister In Tam has slipped into the border area where Thai and Khmer Rouge soldiers are engaged in clashes, Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan said yesterday. General Chatichai's statement confirmed that In Tam, who was ordered by Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj earlier this month to leave the country within a week, is still in the country. The minister also said that In Tam was taken to Bangkok but somehow managed to slip back to the border. He was supposed to go to France. In Tam has announced the formation of a liberation movement against the

current Cambodian government, which is now recognized by Thailand. General Chatichai noted that the recent border incident could have been instigated by In Tam's people or caused by misunderstandings among low-ranking Khmer Rouge soldiers" (emphasis added).

Two days later, on the 17th, the Nation reported "In Tam Meddled in Current Border Dispute," stating, "Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj yesterday openly accused former Cambodian Prime Minister In Tam of meddling in the current border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia at Klong Huay Hia in Prachinburi's Ta Phraya district. He said In Tam, who is staying in a refugee camp in Aranyaprathet, would be asked to leave the border area soon. Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan said he had asked In Tam to "come to see him in Bangkok today or tomorrow".

Nevertheless, In Tam managed to avoid leaving Thailand. A later Nation carried an interview with him at Wat Cha- nachaisri refugee camp, which shed some light on the "In Tam's people" mentioned by the Thai foreign minister in the previously quoted report: "In Tam has a total of 119 relatives living in the refugee camp, as well as about 60 of his followers... There are 2,551 Cambodian refugees in this camp, and many young men said they were still loyal to In Tam. I am ready to defend him with my life," said one tough-looking Cambodian ex-soldier.

The fact that In Tam was able to ignore the Thai government's orders to leave the country is a clear indication of the high level of support for his Cambodian activities in influential circles in Thailand (presumably that section of the military which was dissatisfied with the "soft" policy on communism adopted by the civilian Kukrit government). The Kukrit government was overthrown in elections on April 4, 1976, and replaced by the shaky government of Kukrit's brother, Seni Pramoj, under whom the right-wing Thai military began to operate more openly, leading to the infamous "Bloody Wednesday" military coup of October 6, Lest there be any

doubt about the military intentions of In Tam and his "refugees," a November 29 report in the Bangkok Post clearly stated, "Former Cambodian Prime Minister In Tam, given a one-week deadline to leave Thailand, was yesterday named as one of the strong leaders of a Cambodian government-in-exile in Paris. The announcement, made by Colonel Sowattana, an aide to former Cambodian Prime Minister San Ngoc Tan in Paris, claimed that 135,000 armed troops were on its side. Col. Sowattana named In Tam and San Ngoc Tan as two former aides to former Cambodian President Lon Nol who have joined the government in exile... The 135,000 troops supporting the rebels, he said, ''are armed with sophisticated American weapons delivered immediately after Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge on April 17 this year. And, presumably, many of those 135,000 troops were operating out of In Tam's refugee camps in Thailand.

It was only after the defeat of the Kukri t government in the April 4, 1976 Thai elections that the Thai military, In Tam and his ''refugees'' were able to operate more openly. It was only then, almost a year after the fall of Phnom Penh, that Western journalists were invited to visit the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand. These visits resulted in articles like the one quoted above in Time magazine. But some of the journalists who accompanied the group expressed reservations about the accuracy of the information gathered from the refugee camp inmates (particularly outspoken were Norman Peagam, Bangkok correspondent for the Far East Economic Review, and John Everingham, former Vientiane correspondent for the same magazine). Apparently, upon entering the refugee camps, the journalists were given pieces of paper on which each refugee who was willing to be interviewed had written about their experiences or the torture/killing they had witnessed. The interviews were conducted through the interpreters of the camp staff. Of course, many journalists paid for the information they received by handing out $20 bills to informants. But when others looked over the pieces of paper

(all written in Khmer script), they were surprised to find how many papers said exactly the same thing. In addition, those journalists who spoke Khmer began to realize that there were many refugees who could not speak Khmer at all, and that hardly any of the refugees could actually read or write! Some journalists began to suspect that they were witnessing a kind of stage show, arranged by the camp leaders for publicity purposes and, of course, to bring in much-needed extra income. (These details were given to the author verbally by a former editor of Thai Phien magazine some time later in Bangkok). No photographic evidence has ever been produced by any of the refugee groups, either in Thailand or in Europe. This in itself is perhaps not surprising, given the confusion that must have prevailed when many refugees left Kampuchea. The first photographic evidence of brutality in Kampuchea did not appear until April 8, 1977, in the Washington Post, which carried "photographs depicting forced labor conditions in the countryside, with Cambodians working under the guns of guards. It was only later learned that the same photographs had been offered to the anti-Communist Bangkok Post a year earlier, in April 1976, but that the newspaper had refused to print them; "the offer was declined because of doubts about the origin and authenticity of the photographs," particularly "the way the alleged Khmer Rouge soldiers and those depicted as villagers were dressed... other observers pointed out the possibility that the series of pictures might have been taken in Thailand" (emphasis added).

By the time the Time magazine report on Khmer "atrocities" was published, In Tam had finally left for Paris to take up his more glorious post in government exile, but Time noted that the movement was still being directed - presumably still from the refugee camps - by an (unnamed) "former Cambodian cabinet minister in the Lon Nol regime. The accuracy of the atrocity reports from Khmer refugees in Thailand is thus as questionable as those from Paris (despite the fact that many of the Khmer exiles in

Thailand are of a much lower social class than their counterparts in Paris); not only does it seem highly likely that the atrocity reports may have been fabricated in order to find a quick way to raise money to fund the refugees, the camps, and any related resistance activities, but it is also demonstrably clear from Thai newspaper reports that In Tam and other former Lon Nol government leaders were using the refugee camps as a center for military resistance activities against the government of Democratic Kampuchea. "Rumors" (a good Thai source for factual information) continue to circulate in Bangkok about the refugee camps. Eyebrows were raised in early 1978 when Thai police arrested 37 so-called "Thais" loaded with guns and grenades in Prachinburi on the Thai-Khmer border. None of the so-called "Thais" appeared to speak the Thai language. Police investigations revealed that they were Khmer refugees trained to sneak across the Kampuchean border and lure Khmer Rouge troops back into Thailand in "hot pursuit" to cause Khmer-Thai border incidents. The Thai army had sanctioned the activity, but the "stupid" police, unaware of such plans, had routinely arrested the 37 armed "Thais". Nothing was ever done about the 37 because the army, in an unprecedented (and illegal) move, transferred the case from police to army jurisdiction. It was also discovered that a religious leader, a certain Thai Buddhist monk, Kittivutho Bhikun (Kittisak Jaraensathabawm), was supporting such military training programs in the refugee camps. Kittivutho is a notorious figure in Bangkok's social and political life; on the night of Thailand's "Bloody Wednesday" military coup on October 6, 1976, Kittivutho broadcast over the military's "Armored Radio," urging those in Bangkok to kill "the communists" (students demonstrating at Thammasat University) to protect the Thai nation, the Buddhist religion, and the King. His views had been widely publicized a short time earlier in an interview with Bangkok's Chatturat magazine:

"I think even Thais who believe in Buddhism should do it [kill communists].

Those who destroy the nation, religion and king are not complete men, so killing them is not like killing a man. We should be convinced that it is not killing a man but a devil. This is the duty of every Thai.

Question: But isn't killing a transgression?

"Yes, but only a small one compared to the good of defending the nation, the religion and the king. To act in this way is to gain merit despite the small sin. It is like killing a fish to cook for a monk. Killing the fish is a small sin, but giving it to the monk is a greater good.

Question: So those who kill leftists will escape arrest because of the merit they gain?

"Probably."

Such savory "religious" leaders as Kittivutho seem to support the dubious activities of Khmer refugees in Thailand.4 It was also notable that the atrocity stories from the refugees began to drop off as soon as Thai government policy dictated other priorities. As noted above, the atrocity stories themselves did not begin until after the defeat of the civilian Kukrit government in the April 4, 1976 elections; they peaked during the ideologically far-right government of Prime Minister Tanin Kraivixien, which was installed by the 1976 military coup; the stories then remarkably diminished after a less publicly ideologically right-wing military administration was installed in Bangkok by another military coup led by the present Thai Prime Minister, General Kriangsak Chomanan, in October 1977 ;5 after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the installation of the present Heng Sam Tin government, the atrocity stories miraculously ceased altogether.

The third (and final) source of the atrocity stories and accusations against the Pol Pot government comes from Hanoi and the Vietnamese government itself: via the Kampuchean invasion, the Vietnamese were able to successfully mobilize all their many "progressive" foreign journalist friends,

contacts built up by the remarkable and efficient Vietnamese publicity machine during the Indochina war. (The Cambodians never developed a similarly effective organization in Paris or elsewhere during their war against the U.S.). The effect of the Vietnamese-directed propaganda barrage against Phnom Penh, written on behalf of Vietnam by journalists and intellectuals with "progressive" reputations around the world, has been devastating. Normally sensible commentators such as the Australian writer Wilfred Burtchett and the Japanese journalist Honda Katsuichi - with a high reputation for integrity - have parroted the Vietnamese accusations word for word. Honda Katsuichi's book against Democratic Kampuchea was entirely researched in Hanoi, where he interviewed selected "Cambodian refugees" in Vietnam, specially selected and presented to him by the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry; alleged photographic evidence of the massacres - also carefully provided by the Vietnamese government - is completely unidentifiable and could have been taken anywhere during any war (and there is no shortage of photographs of massacres and war atrocities in contemporary Indochina!) Wilfred Burtchett's information is even more specific. Writing in the October 1978 issue of Afrique-Asie, Burtchett claimed (as did the Vietnamese government) that a dozen Kampuchean leaders, including Ok Sakun, had been internally purged. Richard Dudman, one of two Western journalists who accompanied Malcolm Caldwell on his fateful visit to Kampuchea, reported in a January 1979 article on a meeting with the supposedly dead Ok Sakun:

"Ok Sakun, 45 years old, one of the intellectuals, engineers and economists often said to have been killed in internal purges. He said he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He mentioned Hu Nim, Minister of Information and Propaganda, and Hou Yuon, Minister of the Interior, Communal Reform and the Armed Forces, as others still active in the government who are considered missing in the West.

Vietnamese propaganda against Kampuchea, its avowed enemy, is best

discarded for what it is; a series of fabrications and half-truths designed to discredit Democratic Kampuchea in the rest of the world in order to psychologically prepare for the planned Vietnamese invasion.

All three sources of "atrocity reports" - Khmer exiles in Paris, Khmer exiles in Thailand, and the Vietnamese government - can be shown to be outright fabrications in their more extreme statements; they are at best a highly dubious source of information about events inside Democratic Kampuchea. Moreover, none of the opponents of Democratic Kampuchea has ever addressed the question of why a government committed to an agrarian revolution that needs real people to work in the rice fields would so thoughtlessly kill so many people whose labor was so essential to the success of its agrarian policies. A Kampuchean Foreign Ministry official, Thiounn Prasith, told U.S. journalist Richard Dudman: "We have only about 8 million people. There is no family planning in Kampuchea. We need more and more people. We would like to have 20 million people in 10 years." (Quoted in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 1979.) One of the first Western visitors to Democratic Kampuchea, Swedish Ambassador to Beijing Kaj Bjoerk, stated, "There is one factor which may militate against the likelihood of mass executions at this stage. This is their complaint about lack of manpower and their talk about the need to put more people to work. In my opinion, this indicates that they would rather put people to work than execute them" (Far East Economic Review, March 26, 1976.) In the Der Spiegel interview of May 10, 1977, Ieng Sarv responded to the allegations of mass executions: "These people are crazy. We only sentenced the worst criminals... why should we have killed all of them? We need a huge number of laborers to rebuild the country".

Later, at a press conference in Bangkok (July 19, 1978), Ieng Sary reiterated, "If the Cambodian government committed atrocities against its own people, it could not rally the people against the [Vietnamese]

aggressors. Despite what the refugees say, the Cambodian government is a government that serves the people; it has no reason to massacre its own people. Moreover, of all the Indochinese states, only Democratic Kampuchea has actually urged refugees abroad to return and help build the country (in marked contrast to Vietnam's policy of actively encouraging "boat people" to leave in flimsy boats to face an uncertain future at sea), and certainly no government appeals to exiles to return only to execute them? Prime Minister Pol Pot made the appeal on September 26, 1978 over Radio Phnom Penh: "All Cambodians abroad generally do not want to live in these foreign countries, but they remain there because they have been deceived by our enemies. If they want to return, no matter who they are, we will welcome them warmly. Furthermore, during a visit to the United Nations, Ieng Sary extended an invitation to UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim - which was subsequently accepted - to visit Kampuchea "to see for himself the truth of the human rights allegations" (Associated Press, October 15, 1978).

As noted above, this does not necessarily mean that no one died in the radical restructuring of Kampuchean society - far from it. But the allegations of genocide, mass murder, or millions of deaths cannot be substantiated; the evidence cited all points in the opposite direction. Pol Pot himself responded to Richard Dudman, Elizabeth Becker and Malcolm Caldwell in Phnom Penh: "We think that 95 percent of the people, both before and after the liberation on April 17, 1975, are good. Of the other 5 percent who were hesitant, we were able to successfully re-educate and recover more than 4 percent, because they were able to re-educate themselves through the actual revolutionary movement. As for the remaining less than 1 percent, we are doing our utmost to re-educate them. Ieng Sary himself, as quoted above, has stated that some two or three thousand people died during the evacuation of Phnom Penh and some later worked in the countryside.

The government has also stated that several high-ranking officials of the old

Lon Nol regime were executed (for example, former Prime Minister Long Boret). None of these admissions, however, indicate widespread or general violations of human rights in the generally accepted sense of the term.

It is not enough, however, to show that allegations of atrocities, massacres, and deaths have been exaggerated and distorted without offering some explanation as to why such allegations were made in the first place, especially when the allegations themselves were false. In most reports, the deaths were attributed to a variety of causes, the most commonly cited being starvation, lack of proper medical care, the forced and sudden evacuation of Phnom Penh and other cities (such as Battambang), and harsh working conditions in the fields after the urban population was relocated to the countryside. By suggesting that these phenomena were the responsibility of the Khmer Rouge, the propagandists carefully concealed the real reasons for the starvation, lack of medical care, and evacuation of Phnom Penh. The fact that people had been dying of starvation in alarming numbers and that Cambodian hospitals had been grossly overcrowded and unsanitary long before the liberation of Phnom Penh was carefully omitted.

Long before the liberation of Phnom Penh, the economy of Lon Nol's Cambodia was a shambles. By the end of 1973, the rice surplus areas of Kompong Thom and Takeo had virtually all fallen into the hands of the National United Front of Kampuchea (NUFK). The total area under rice cultivation dropped from 2.46 million hectares in 1969 to 500,000 hectares in 1974. The destruction of agricultural machinery and the conscription of young men into the army caused a decline in yields on the rice fields that remained under Lon Nol's control. Rice production fell from a total of 3.8 million tons in 1969-70 to just 493,000 tons in 1974-75 - an 87 percent drop in output. Whereas Cambodia had exported about 230,000 tons of rice in 1968, it was forced to import about 282,000 tons in 1974.

Phnom Penh was slowly being flooded with refugees fleeing the U.S.

bombing. The city's population grew from a pre-war figure of 600,000 to a probable total of nearly 3 million (an official census was never taken during the war, but estimates by various official organizations ranged from 1.2 million to over 2 million). When the city was evacuated, the Democratic Kampuchea government conducted a census, which, according to a later interview with Ieng Sary, put the total at nearly 3 million). The resulting rice shortage drove up the price of rice from 10 riels per kilogram in December 1971 to 125 riels per kilogram in December 1973, and later to 300 riels and more in early 1975 (by mid-February the price was 340 riels per kilogram).

Lack of food can only lead to one result - starvation. An investigation by the Inspector General of the Office of the Inspector General of Foreign Assistance of the U.S. Department of State in February 1975 "confirmed the general medical impression given to us by those concerned with health and nutrition in Cambodia that children are starving to death. The medical evidence was corroborated by the observations of journalists; at a small Catholic Relief Services hospital in Neak Luong, Sydney Schanberg of the New York Times described the scene on February 24, 1975:

"The children are gathered by the dozen around a Western newsman... Some have swollen bellies. Some are shrunken. One 10-year-old girl has dehydrated to the size of a 4-year-old. Their throats are filled with harsh bronchial coughs, the beginnings of pneumonia and tuberculosis. All have dysentery. Their noses run constantly. Their skin has become scaly. Every scratch on their legs and arms becomes an ulcer.

The mortality rate among the few children lucky enough to be admitted to the few functioning clinics was extremely high. At the Red Cross clinic, the death rate reached 46 percent of those admitted in February 1975 alone. Most could never hope to enter a clinic. The World Vision Child Nutrition Center, for example, had to turn away 1,758 severely malnourished children in a two-month period beginning in December 1974 because of a lack of

beds. The Office of the Inspector General noted in the report cited above: "It takes little imagination to picture these pitifully frail and sickly little bodies, carried away in the arms of their feeble mothers, carried away somewhere to die: certain to suffer untreated, unhospitalized, unfed. Dr. Gay Alexander, head of Catholic Relief Services, said in March 1975, "Hundreds are dying every day from malnutrition.

An eyewitness in Phnom Penh that same month was quoted in Newsweek as saying, "Thousands of small children, their bellies swollen with hunger, awaited slow death from kwashiorkor and marasmus. From such accounts, it has been estimated that there must have been an average of 250 deaths from starvation per day during the final days of the war; a figure that would give 8,000 deaths for the month of March alone and an estimated minimum of 15,000 for the last 5 months of the war.

According to a study by the Indochina Resource Center, by 1974 an analysis of the total resources used by the Lon Nol regime to maintain control of Phnom Penh and a few outlying enclaves showed that only 2.2 percent came from domestic revenues, while 95.1 percent came from U.S. aid. In fiscal years 1971, 1972, and 1973, the United States provided $748 million in aid to Lon Nol, of which only $1.1 million went to aid refugees in Phnom Penh (the rest supported either military equipment or military salaries). U.S. Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey protested in April 1975 that "despite warnings that large numbers of Cambodian children were beginning to suffer from malnutrition and that a crisis was developing, little was done by either the U.S. or Cambodian governments to meet the crisis," and that despite the extraordinary U.S. airlift to the besieged city of Phnom Penh, the administration had badly "disregarded the need to get food into the city until forced to do so [by Congress]." At the same time, an Associated Press report on March 5, 1975, stated that the U.S. was airlifting 565 tons of ammunition into Phnom Penh every day!

Medical services in pre-liberation Phnom Penh were also woefully inadequate. Of the four major hospitals, Preah Ket Mealea Hospital was reported to have more than three times the number of patients it could adequately treat, and lacked antibiotics, sterile bandages, syringes, and stethoscopes. What modern equipment it did have - operating room lights and sterilization equipment - was rendered unusable by constant power shortages (U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee report). The same committee reported in 1971 that another major hospital, the Khmer-Soviet Hospital, had only 512 beds and 27 doctors for 1,009 patients. Newsweek reported in March 1975 from an eyewitness at the same hospital:

"At the Khmer-Sovietique Hospital, more than 1,300 patients were struggling to survive last week. Doctors, nurses, medics, medicines and plasma were scarce; malaria, tuberculosis and dysentery were rampant. In desperation, overworked staff in some wards tied the wounded to their beds to prevent their wounds and stitches from breaking open. Flies covered the face of one such patient, who could only shake his head feebly in a vain attempt to keep them from crawling into his mouth".

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee in January 1975, Dr. David French ("Humanitarian Problems in Indochina") described a visit to one of the hospitals:

"We walked down the corridors with stretchers of faces with open wounds unattended; filth and debris, flies and insects and everything, and there was apparently no medical staff to attend to their needs."

A report by the Inspector General of Foreign Assistance for the same period stated:

"The facilities were not only overcrowded, but for the most part crude and unsanitary. There was an acute shortage of drugs and medical supplies. Death often resulted from infection and lack of proper care; patients with severed limbs or severe abdominal trauma were not medicated. Little or

inadequate antibiotic therapy was given to patients who needed it. . . Patients overflowed the wards and lay on mats or stretchers in the halls and corridors, their unattended wounds exposed to the dirt and filth of aseptic conditions; the stench of pus and infection mingled with the foul odor of clogged, flooded toilets."

These were the conditions the Khmer guerrillas inherited when they entered Phnom Penh in April 1975. The evacuation of Phnom Penh was designed to remove the city's population to the source of food supplies and within reach of proper medical care provided by clinics already established in liberated bases. It was later claimed that the Khmer Rouge had closed all the hospitals and left their patients to die in cold-blooded hatred. This was not true. The only hospital considered fit to receive patients, the former French-run Calmette Hospital, was never closed. According to Lawrence Masuel in his report, "Phnom Penh, L'ambassade en perdition," published in Paris Match on May 10, 1975, ten French doctors who emerged from the hospital to join the other foreigners gathered at the French Embassy compound stated, "We have the impression that they are replacing us with their own doctors, and in any case the hospital is functioning normally. Far from causing deaths from starvation and unsanitary conditions, the Khmer revolutionary soldiers must have saved an incalculable number of lives by hastily moving some three million people out of the death hole of Phnom Penh to the countryside, where both food and adequate medical care were available.

Democratic Kampuchea thus inherited starvation and unsanitary health conditions from the previous Lon Nol government and its U.S. backers; the government of Democratic Kampuchea did not create these conditions, but it had to find solutions to them. In addition, Agence France Presse reported that Lon Nol's prime minister, Long Boret, said on the eve of Phnom Penh's surrender that the city had enough rice to last only eight days. Transporting

food into Phnom Penh was impossible. First, as Ieng Sary later pointed out (in an interview with the Chicago Tribune, September 10, 1975): "We did not have enough transportation to bring food into the capital." There was also a shortage of fuel, as the new government received virtually no foreign aid and relied on supplies captured from the enemy during the war; after U.S. fuel supplies to the Lon Nol regime dried up, the new government had to trade for fuel across the border in Thailand (according to a report by Sri Lankan journalist Errol de Silva, who visited Kampuchea in August 1975). The lack of clean water was also a health hazard in the city; the U.S. Inspector General of Foreign Assistance reported in March 1975 that contaminated water supplies presented "the potential for the spread of epidemics of cholera and typhoid fever" and concluded that "unsanitary living conditions in Phnom Penh caused by overcrowding and the influx of refugees into the city create a health hazard and a danger of epidemics. Although several witnesses later reported that the new government's soldiers had distributed cholera vaccine to the population, there was simply not enough to go around.

But the plan to evacuate the cities was certainly not new. Thai military intelligence reports had emphasized that the Khmer Rouge were militarily capable of taking Phnom Penh whenever they wished for several years prior to the actual liberation of the city; the fact that the Khmer Rouge did not choose to take the city and thus end the war earlier must have been related to the logistics of supplying the city of Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge leaders also viewed the cities (Phnom Penh and, to a lesser extent, Battambang) as false, external creations within Cambodia. Urban life was a lifestyle imported from the West; the cities were a kind of internal enclave of Western culture, foreign businesses, and diplomats, completely disconnected from the rest of the Cambodian peasant economy; the money market economy operated only in the cities (the rest of the nation operated on a

barter/natural economy). The clear intention to restructure the Cambodian economy - minus its urban enclaves of Western culture and domination - had already been expressed in Khieu Samphan's early thesis on "Underdevelopment in Cambodia". But the appalling conditions inherited by the new government in Phnom Penh gave new urgency to the implementation of the plan. There were undoubtedly deaths during the evacuation (admitted by Ieng Sary), and there may well have been disease outbreaks during the evacuation before people could be brought to clinics in the formerly liberated countryside; but to blame this on the Khmer Rouge is absurd. The Khmer Rouge, who inherited these squalid conditions from Lon Nol and the US, did everything they could to reduce the death toll, which was much lower than one might have expected. Father Englemann summarized the reports of Catholic priests involved in the evacuation as follows: "In the first few days there were deaths: some very sick, some old people, some newborn babies, but very few. In any case, not thousands, as some newspapers wrote". Since 1972, a comprehensive medical care system had been established in the liberated areas, consisting of at least one hospital in each province, a fully trained doctor for each district, a medical committee for each village, and two male nurses with three years of medical training for each hamlet. The entire system was headed by Dr. Thiounn Thioeun, former dean of the medical school at Phnom Penh University and former director of the Khmer-Soviet Hospital. They were evacuated from Phnom Penh's unhygienic hospitals to be taken care of by this superior and pre-existing medical structure.

There have also been allegations that the population of Democratic Kampuchea was forced at gunpoint to labor under extremely harsh conditions. As noted above, the only photographic evidence presented to prove this (printed in the Washington Post) was so suspect that a generally anti-communist Thai newspaper refused to publish it. Nor are these

allegations consistent with the observations of any foreign visitor to Kampuchea. Ito Tadashi, the Kyodo News Service correspondent who visited Cambodia last September, quotes figures for working hours that are consistent with the observations of other foreigners, namely an 8-hour day in both the countryside and the few factories in the cities, divided into periods of 6 to 11 in the morning and 2 to 5 in the afternoon. He confirms that meals are usually eaten together in the communities or factories. He also added:

"In our journey of more than 1,000 kilometers through rural Cambodia, the expressions on the faces of most of the farmers we saw along the way were radiant. One had the impression both that these people had adapted well to their new environment and that the leisurely, relaxed atmosphere peculiar to rural areas in the tropics had in many ways survived the political changes". (Japan Times, October 20, 1978.)

Elizabeth Becker also noted in her report in Newsweek (January 8, 1979): "We saw no such abuses ourselves... Where are the armed guards oppressing the peasants?* Caldwell would sneer as we drove past rice fields with no guards in sight.

In terms of the working hours and conditions observed, one might profitably compare them to the situation of day laborers in Japan in areas such as Kamgasaki. Even when work is available, most day laborers leave home at 6 a.m. and usually do not return until after 7 p.m. (this time includes working hours, looking for work, and travel time.) From their meager earnings, they often have to pay their nightly rent in a "doya" or hotel, as well as tuberculosis (which is not supposed to be provided for them). There is no adequate health care, and diseases such as tuberculosis (which should not exist in "modern" Japan) are quite common. With such comparisons, it is difficult to see the Kampuchean peasant, who works 8 hours a day in the fields with a 3 hour lunch break and meals provided on the spot, as a

brutally oppressed laborer. (Health care, of course, is free.) Perhaps not surprisingly, the few lower-class Cambodian refugees who have come to the West-such as Khuon Sakhon, a former farmer, and Peang Sophi, a worker in Melbourne, Australia-give a very different picture of working conditions in Democratic Kampuchea. Peang Sophi has stated that working conditions in revolutionary' Kampuchea in 1975-76 were less harsh than in the Melbourne factory where he now works, and Cambodian resident in Australia, Chantou Boua, has stated that "many refugees arriving in Melbourne complained that the normal factory work they were doing was 'harder than the so-called forced labor they had escaped in Kampuchea'" (unpublished letter to The Times dated August 10, 1977, reproduced in Journal of Contemporary Asia). Note that a much more detailed book outlining the falsehoods spread by the Western press about all three Indochinese countries since their liberation is being published in the USA by Noam Chomsky.

The twisting and distortion of the information before it appeared in the Christian Science Monitor editorial was investigated by Malcolm Caldwell through correspondence with the authors involved. Despite the fact that the informants agreed with Caldwell's conclusions at every stage, the Christian Science Monitor never published a retraction of the editorial's extreme conclusions. Caldwell's correspondence on the subject was later published in the Journal of Contemporary Asia.

The exact number of Khmer refugees in Thailand is difficult to determine. The UN Commissioner for Refugees has stated on several occasions that there are 170,000 refugees from Cambodia and Laos in Thailand. The number of Cambodian refugees has been estimated by Agence France Pressie to be between 30,000 and 50,000. However, Thai Communist Party publications earlier this year claimed that the number of Khmer refugees could be as low as 10,000. Whichever figure is accepted for the number of Khmer refugees, it is in any case extremely small, a fact which in itself

should be cause for serious reflection.

Both the Thai government and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees have repeatedly stated that the number of Lao refugees in Thailand is "over 120,000". For both Laos and Cambodia, Thailand is the only land exit route for refugees, and it may be pertinent to ask why there should be more than 120,000 refugees from Laos, with a population of only about 3 million, while for Kampuchea - with a much larger population of nearly 8 million - there are only about 40,000, to take a larger estimate! These figures alone would suggest that conditions in Laos should be carefully scrutinized - not those in Kampuchea! It is rather difficult to determine the accuracy of the information concerning conditions in Laos. Suffice it to say that Thai Communist Party sources have claimed (earlier this year) that since Laos and Viet Nam signed a 25-year "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" in July 1977, as many as one million Vietnamese have immigrated to Laos as settlers. It is also claimed that Vietnam has as many as 40 or 50,000 troops permanently stationed in Laos. If true, the inescapable implication is that almost a quarter of Laos population is now Vietnamese, and whatever the justifiable reasons for this migration, it smacks of an extreme form of "assimilation" policy and casts considerable doubt on Vietnam's motives in creating an "Indochina Federation.

The current Lao Prime Minister, Khay-sone Phomvihane, is half-Vietnamese. A sign that all is not well in Laos was the flight of Lao Deputy Prime Minister Phoumi Vongvichit across the Mekong River to Thailand at the end of March this year. He appeared to be on his way to China, but apparently agreed to return to Laos after meeting with Khaysone representatives in Hong Kong. The full details of the incident are not yet known. Nevertheless, it must be cause for reflection that Phoumi, a staunch Laotian liberation fighter during the war, would consider such a course of action.

The incident was reported in detail in the February 1978 issue of the Thai

language magazine Athit (Sun). The March Sarnie magazine also suggested that the former Thai ambassador to Phnom Penh (Lon Nol's), Chanat Samutwanich, had been involved in these activities. In the interview published in Athit, Chanat said that as ex-ambassador, many refugees who had been his former friends in Phnom Penh came to him seeking humanitarian aid. He added that he had been pressured by several senior figures in the Thai military to help the refugees, clearly indicating that the refugees were receiving political support from senior Thai quarters. However, in a subsequent interview in Matichon magazine (March 12, 1979), Chanat stated that in order to get rice and fish (from Tonglesap), the Vietnamese were "forcing the Khmer farmers to work much, much harder than under the former Pol Pot government.

According to the February 1978 Athit article quoted above, Kittivutho conducts military training programs for Khmer refugees from Wat Jittapawan temple in Chonburi province, east of Bangkok. The Atlvt showed in its early 1978 issues that refugee reports of atrocities reached their peak under the Thanin government. It noted that both atrocity reports and border incidents dropped dramatically after Kriangsak took power in October 1977, as the new government sought to improve relations with Indochina. The magazine concluded that because the reports and their tone varied in quality and quantity according to the attitudes of the governments in power in Bangkok, they reflected only the current attitudes of the Bangkok administration and not the objective situation in Kampuchea under Pol Pot. Shortly after these statements, Athit reported that it had been instructed by General Prem, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Thai Army, to cease publishing any further information on Khmer refugees in Thailand.

Vietnamese government sources were the most common source of atrocity stories. It is interesting to note that the Soviet Union initially attacked the atrocity reports and human rights allegations about Kampuchea. As Soviet

relations with Vietnam deepened, the tenor of the Soviet reports softened until, after the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty last December, the Soviet Union made a propaganda about-face and added its voice to those condemning Pol Pot for atrocities and human rights violations.

The following details of the growing starvation in Phnom Penh, the collapse of medical services, and the evacuation of the cities are largely taken from the first two chapters of "Cambodia: Famine and Revolution" by George C. Hildebrand and Gareth Porter (Monthly Review Press, 1976). Space does not permit a full translation of these two excellently documented chapters.